

Farms to Food Bank Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes

January 14, 2009

Attendees:

Contractors: Jackie Dale, Food Lifeline, Mike Cohen, Bellingham Food Bank, Rod Wieber, 2nd Harvest Inland Northwest, Linda Schneider, Pat Sajack, Washington Gorge Action Programs, Sarah Hackney, Gorge Grown Food Network

Farm Representatives: Maggie Hoback, Full Circle Farms, Emily Thomson, Full Circle Farm, Clayton Burrows, Growing Washington

Agency Representatives: Fred Berman, WSDA, Small Farms Program Coordinator

CTED: Tim Bernthal, Farms to Food Bank Coordinator, Susan Eichrodt, Emergency Food Assistance Program Manager, Mary Soderquist, Emergency Food Assistance Program Coordinator, Dan McConnell, CTED Assistant Director, Community Division

Attendees introduced themselves and identified the organizations they represented. Farm representatives were present from two of the targeted vendors for the projects, (2 Full Circle staff for the Food Lifeline project and a representative from small farms that are planning to be contractors with Bellingham Food Bank.) Each of the contractors had been requested to invite a farm vendor to participate on the Advisory Committee.

Committee Focus and Tasks The focus of the committee was described as soliciting input on the operation of the project, challenges and concerns, from both the contractors and farm vendors perspective. In addition, sharing of resources, vendor information, and successful strategies is a goal. The committee plans to meet at least one more time in the first year time period (up to June 30, 2009).

Project Contractors' Overview

Food Lifeline is working with the Seattle Food Committee to choose and monitor product choices to supply 29 food banks in Seattle. They are doing preparatory work for establishing buying from up to 15 local and regional farmers. Their priority is for the products not normally donated to food banks, with preference for organically grown (but not necessarily certified organic), from local small farms. 13 farms are expected to supply Seattle Food Committee members on rotating basis. Their first purchase was from Full Circle Farm, and they have met and worked out terms; it's been a good first partnership.

Washington Gorge Action Programs (WGAP) will supply 4 rural food banks covering a huge 2-county area with one to several deliveries of food/month. WAGAP will find farm vendors through Gorge Grown Food Network, a small non-profit with experience creating and managing area farmers markets. WAGAP sees this project's support of small farmers as important to the local economy. So far, they've struggled with arranging cost-effective purchases for organic milk and milk products, and have bought winter squash. They expect to serve 1,500 households/month.

Bellingham Food Bank will supply 9 food banks in Bellingham and Whatcom County. Contracts with farms and producers will include milk from a local dairy, eggs from a local supplier, and a variety of produce from local 4 farms and the Bellingham Food Bank Farm. Milk and eggs deliveries will begin this week, with farm produce arriving later in the spring. The Food Bank Farm will be mentored by other contracted farmers to help increase their production for donation to the food bank system.

2nd Harvest Inland Northwest Response to outreach to over 20 growers to become farm vendors has been slow and challenging because of the busy time of year. The project will focus on tree fruit, dairy/eggs, and vegetables. First purchases were made for locally grown potatoes and distributed to 20 Spokane area food banks and distribution center throughout Eastern Washington.

Major Challenges/Areas of Concern to Date

A major concern was raised how to spend the first year's budget in the short remaining time in the fiscal year if contractors had to spend funds and receive deliveries by June 30. Contractors felt it required a big thought process change, and that winter/spring crops were much less available than summer/fall production. Susan Eichrodt described the one exception tentatively approved, a CSA structure - payment in advance, but delivery allowed after June 30 as crops were available. Dan approved in concept if the exception from state requirements was OK'd by Office of Financial Management, but wanted to get it in writing. Strong support was expressed by contractors/farmers for having flexibility to accept product deliveries after June 30. (NOTE: The modified CSA structure was subsequently approved by the Office of Financial Management.)

Legislative Funding Status and Year Two Funding Update

Dan McConnon, Assistant Director, Community Services, CTED, gave an overview of program funding status. Governor's budget has removed specific line item funding in amending the 2008 – 2009 supplemental budget to balance by June 30, 2009. The word we have is they don't intend to strike this year's funding, but we don't know for sure that it won't get cut. Programs may want to move ahead with spending funds now. Signs point to resolving the supplemental budget (this year's budget, ending June 30) possibly by as early as the end of January. At this point the odds of the program's next year budget being authorized are fairly slim, as it is not in the Governor's proposed budget. In the event funding doesn't come through we will give out information as early as possible.

Challenges of Spending One-Year Funding

Discussion centered around how the CSA structure approach (payment in advance, contracted product delivered over period extending to the fall season) would allow the flexibility growers needed. The modified CSA structure without customized individual boxed selection of items and limited selection was described as being similar to forward contracting, it may be just a matter of semantics.

Dan suggested that we might explore alternative sources of funding to extend the program through a second year. Fred Berman mentioned the possibility of a grant from USDA such as their Specialty Crops Block Grant Program, applied for by a coalition. Susan suggested one option would be to set aside ½ of funds needed from EFAP monies, and work to get the other half from participating agencies or private grants. Some members felt their area food banks would not be open to spending EFAP funds for Farms to Food Bank. A hybrid model was suggested, taking ½ of the funds from EFAP, and matching it with funds from other sources procured by food banks. The Gates Foundation grants to Food Lifeline and 2nd Harvest Inland NW were suggested to be explored as a match for other funds.

The basic concern was restated that with the uncertainty in funding and the short remaining timeframe, it is very difficult to work effectively with farmers. Approval of the

CSA model and allowances for deliveries after the end of the fiscal year was seen as greatly reducing this problem.

CTED committed to a quick answer on approval of CSA model for purchases. Susan encouraged food banks to contact their legislators to get an answer on funding for a 2nd year.

Sharing Information/Project Models

Tim described the intention of sharing information between contractors on purchasing sources, transportation, buying strategies. Contractors are encouraged to communicate with each other, and a list of contact name and information was distributed. We will be using the CTED website to post background information, progress reports, and results of the project, and would like to encourage food banks to make use of it. As a first step, each contractors is requested to produce a 1-page summary of their project and submit it by Jan. 30.

Documenting Farms to Food Banks in Pictures and Words

Contractors are encouraged to begin documenting their projects in pictures and narrative, and to submit materials for the CTED website. Tim will be assisting in photodocumentation along with his on-site visits in the next several months.

Next Meeting

Contractors suggested 2 shorter meetings in the next 6 months, rather than one longer meeting. We will arrange times in March and May via teleconference.